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Jim Gower
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Dear Mr Gower

Special measures monitoring inspection of King Arthur's Community School

Following my visit with Kathy Maddocks, Her Majesty's Inspector, and Stephen McShane, Her Majesty's Inspector, to your school on 23–24 October 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2017.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2017.

- Accelerate the progress made by all pupils, especially the disadvantaged, so that they achieve at least as well as other pupils nationally from their starting points by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve
 - ensuring that teachers have access to information about pupils' prior learning and use this to plan activities that enable pupils to make good progress
 - making sure that pupils complete work to a high standard
 - clearly identifying, and then meeting, the needs of disadvantaged pupils and those who enter the school below expectations in English and mathematics to enable them to catch up
 - building from pupils' compliance in lessons to consistently positive attitudes to learning and study.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - rigorously and accurately evaluating the work of the school, to understand the impact of strategies to improve pupils' progress
 - ensuring that governors have the necessary skills and understanding to support the school strategically
 - ensuring that governors hold leaders rigorously to account for the performance of the school
 - increasing the impact that additional funding has on the outcomes of the pupils for whom it is intended, including pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.
- Urgently take action to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that teachers:
 - accurately assess pupils' learning and address any misconceptions quickly
 - challenge the most able pupils to think more deeply about their learning
 - provide pupils with learning activities that interest them and are closely matched to their needs.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management should be improved.

An external review of the school's use of pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the first monitoring inspection on 23 October 2018 to 24 October 2018

Evidence

During the inspection, inspectors met with the interim headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and staff. The lead inspector met with the chair of the interim executive board and the chief executive officer of the Sherborne Area Schools Trust (SAST), a multi-academy trust. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors observed pupils' learning in a range of subjects and across all year groups. Many of these observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors spoke informally with pupils from Years 7 to 11, with a group of Year 10 pupils and with a group of Year 11 prefects. Inspectors scrutinised samples of pupils' work. Inspectors considered a range of documentation, including minutes of the interim executive board and the school's plans for improvement.

Context

Ansford Academy, a nearby school, began formal support work with the school well before the inspection in November 2017. Immediately prior to the inspection, the governing body of the school was replaced by a joint governing body with Ansford Academy. This was led by the chair of the governing body at Ansford Academy, a national leader of governance.

After the publication of the report, in January 2018, Ansford Academy was formally asked by the local authority to provide support to the school through a statement of action. The headteacher resigned and the joint governing body appointed an interim headteacher to lead the school.

In March 2018, the regional schools commissioner invited SAST to be the prospective sponsor of the school. The proposed academy conversion date is January 2019. Senior leaders from Ansford Academy continued to support the school until July 2018. Two weeks before the end of the summer term, a senior leader from The Gryphon School in Sherborne was appointed as the new interim headteacher.

In September 2018, an interim executive board, appointed by the local authority, took responsibility for the governance of the school. SAST agreed to provide support to the school in the period leading up to the proposed academy conversion.

SAST is currently providing extensive help and advice to the school. In addition to the interim headteacher, three senior leaders, a business manager and a catering manager have been seconded from The Gryphon School.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

The interim headteacher leads by example. In a short period of time, he has gained pupils' trust and respect. He is ambitious for all pupils. He has a vision for improving pupils' progress by raising teachers' expectations of what they can achieve.

The senior leadership team now has considerably greater capacity to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the school. It has ensured that plans for improving the school are based on accurate judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Consequently, these plans are realistic and coherent.

Middle leaders understand the urgency required to raise pupils' progress further and so help them attain the qualifications they are capable of. In the past, the system for managing the performance of staff was not being applied rigorously enough. As a result, it was not effective in holding staff accountable for the quality of their work. The new leadership team is ensuring that this system is now implemented rigorously. However, it is too early to see this rigour translated into changes in the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders' work to build links with parents and carers, and with organisations in the local community, has been successful. Senior leaders' presentations, charity events and social media activity have all combined to communicate a long-term vision for raising pupils' progress and attainment. As a result, parents demonstrate increasing confidence in the school.

Governors commissioned a review of the use of pupil premium funding following the previous inspection. This was timely and useful. Last year, Year 11 disadvantaged pupils made good progress across a range of GCSE subjects. Current leaders are developing a new strategy for supporting these pupils based on the resources that are available.

The interim executive board is a small but effective team. Governors are very experienced and highly skilled. They hold senior leaders to account well. For example, they have insisted that all statutory school policies are reviewed urgently and brought up to date. This work is now complete.

A governance review was not carried out after the inspection in November 2017 because the previous governing body had already been replaced at the time of the inspection.

Using new assessment procedures, senior leaders provide governors with increasingly accurate information about the progress of groups of pupils within the school. Governors are acutely aware of the need to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They understand that improvements in Year 11 pupils' outcomes are currently too reliant on extra help given to pupils outside of normal lessons in the approach to public exams. This intervention work is not sustainable.

The interim executive board is aiming to convert the school into an academy in January 2019. The chief executive officer of the prospective sponsor is working closely and effectively with the board, and with representatives of the local authority, to support the school in the period before conversion.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

At the previous inspection, teaching was not sufficiently well planned to provide learning experiences that closely matched the needs of different groups of pupils. Pupils were not challenged to learn deeply because teachers' expectations of what they can achieve were too low. Many of these features of teaching remain today.

However, senior leaders have developed an accurate method of assessing pupils' progress in key stage 3 and key stage 4. Therefore, they are better able to monitor pupils' achievements and so evaluate closely the impact of their actions to improve teaching. Pupils have a better understanding of the standard of work they should be producing. For example, Year 11 pupils have regular opportunities to try GCSE examination questions and so they have a clear idea of what is expected of them.

Teachers now have good-quality information about the needs of pupils in their classes. For example, a pupil profile system gives teachers timely information about pupils' individual needs and aptitudes. Nevertheless, a significant amount of teaching is still poorly planned and so does not engage pupils' interest. Too much teaching is being delivered by non-specialists. Pupils expressed concern about this to inspectors.

Teaching still does not consistently challenge pupils. Lower-ability pupils made good progress last year but middle-ability pupils, and the most able, are not given work that stretches them and so many of them do not make the progress they are capable of. For example, pupils do not have a deep enough understanding of the use of inference when studying literature.

Teaching in humanities is a strength of the school. Pupils make good progress in history and geography as a result of the effective teaching in these subjects.

Many pupils express themselves clearly. However, some pupils' speaking and listening skills are not well developed. These pupils struggle to communicate sophisticated ideas because teaching has not modelled these skills for them in the past.

Senior leaders have introduced assessments of key stage 3 pupils' reading and spelling ages at the start of the year. Teachers use this information to provide some pupils in key stage 3 with extra help to develop their basic literacy skills. However, this work has only recently been implemented and so many pupils' proficiency in reading and spelling remains weak.

Since September, staff have received training in teaching literacy skills in subjects other than English. For example, training has been provided on the use of different sentence types. Teachers' skills are improving. However, this initiative is still at an early stage and so has not caused significant change yet.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Pupils' conduct in lessons is calm. Where teaching is best, pupils are inspired by thought-provoking work that helps them learn quickly and securely. However, too many pupils are not motivated by teaching. They are polite and respond positively to teachers' requests, but they are not enthused. Some pupils quietly switch off in lessons when they lose interest.

Pupils' behaviour around the site is polite and well-mannered. Pupils mix well with each other at breaktime and lunchtime. The school is an orderly place to learn. Pupils rightly feel that some areas of the school buildings are in urgent need of redecoration. Even so, pupils treat the school environment with respect and rarely cause damage or graffiti.

The rate of pupils' attendance is above average. Pupils come to school regularly and are rarely late to their classes. Few pupils are persistently absent from school. Senior leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely. They provide timely support for any pupils whose attendance slips.

The personal, social and health education programme prepares pupils well to face the risks of living in our society. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online. Pupils feel safe in school. Incidents of bullying are rare.

Pupils told inspectors that they are excited by the changes taking place this term. Senior leaders listen to pupils' views carefully. Pupils said they find senior leaders, and particularly the interim headteacher, very approachable. As a result, pupils feel included in plans to improve the school. They are positive about the involvement of staff from The Gryphon School and feel hopeful about the future.

Outcomes for pupils

Year 11 pupils' progress, measured across eight GCSE subjects, rose in 2018 compared to the previous year. However, this improvement relied on extra help given to Year 11 pupils outside of their normal lessons. Without improvement to the underlying quality of teaching, learning and assessment, this approach is not sustainable.

Pupils' progress in GCSE English improved in 2018, but it is still well below the national average. The most able pupils are still not challenged consistently in

English, and so they are not making sufficient progress. As a result, they are not attaining the standards that could reasonably be expected of them.

Year 11 pupils' progress in mathematics has been around the national average for the past two years. Mathematics teaching enables many pupils to gain a standard pass and the least able pupils are supported well to make good progress in this subject. Nevertheless, too few pupils from all abilities go further and attain a good pass or better. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade 5 in both GCSE English and mathematics was well below the national average in 2018.

The proportion of disadvantaged pupils at this school is average. Disadvantaged pupils' progress exceeded the progress of other pupils nationally last year. Teachers know their pupils well and so they are able to identify particular barriers to learning when they occur.

Pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities made good progress from their starting points last year. The leadership of this area of the school's work has fluctuated over the last year. The interim executive board has challenged senior leaders and the trust to provide more support for these pupils. Subsequently, the leadership of provision for special educational needs pupils has been secured.

The newly established special educational needs team tracks the progress of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities well. It ensures that resources are used wisely. However, the quality of classroom teaching is too weak to secure these pupils' basic skills and meet their individual needs consistently.

Senior leaders acknowledge that the progress of the most able pupils currently in the school is weak because some teachers' expectations of these pupils are too low. The quality of work in pupils' books confirms this. However, pupils told inspectors that, this term, teachers are beginning to challenge them more and so they are feeling more confident about reaching their academic targets.

External support

Support from the governing body, principal and senior leaders of Ansford Academy helped to stabilise the school in the period immediately following the previous inspection. Staff found the clarity of leadership helpful at this time and through the spring term. However, the pace of improvement slowed because of deliberations about which academy would be the preferred long-term sponsor of the school. The decision, in March 2018, to name SAST as the prospective sponsor of the school meant that momentum was lost during the summer term.

The interim executive board was established by the local authority in September 2018. It quickly began work with SAST to regain the momentum of improvement. The board appointed staff, on secondment from The Gryphon School, to critical

leadership and management roles. These leaders have been effective in supporting the school to establish fundamental expectations of teaching. They have renewed statutory policies in many areas of the school's work and brought clarity to the school's financial management processes. As a result of this support, senior leaders, middle leaders and teachers are clear about the strategic direction of the school and the steps necessary to improve teaching.